IN BRIEF

WORLD PROGRAMME OF ACTION CONCERNING DISABLED PERSONS

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INTRODUCTION

More than half a billion people throughout the world are disabled because of mental, physical or sensory impairment. Many are also handicapped by physical and social barriers that relegate them to the margins of society.

Disabled persons are often denied the most basic educational opportunities as children and, as adults, often must take menial or poorly paid jobs. Physical restrictions bar them from public buildings and transport. Social attitudes exclude them from cultural life and normal social relationships. Prejudice and ignorance lead to unnecessary institutionalization. Society also suffers, since the loss of their enormous potential as human beings impoverishes all humankind.

The United Nations has a long history of actively championing the rights of disabled persons and working to improve their conditions through social and humanitarian programmes. In the early 1980s, these activities moved into high profile when the General Assembly proclaimed 1981 as the International Year of Disabled Persons. This led to the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons, adopted by the General Assembly in December 1982. To provide an initial time frame for Governments and organizations to implement the Programme, the General Assembly proclaimed 1983-1992 as the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons.

The World Programme of Action is a global strategy aimed at preventing disability, enhancing rehabilitation and ensuring the full participation of disabled persons in normal social life

and economic development. One of the Programme's major principles is the idea that disabled individuals should have the same access as anyone else to all that society offers and an equal share in any improvements that occur. This applies to all countries, regardless of their level of development. The Programme also emphasizes the importance of direct participation by disabled persons themselves in planning, implementing and evaluating the activities affecting them.

This booklet summarizes the provisions of the World Programme of Action. It is not intended to replace it, and therefore the full text should be consulted for comprehensive information.

Background

Disability is a global problem, affecting approximately one out of every 10 persons. It is particularly acute in developing countries, where the incidence of disability may be twice as high. In fact, it is estimated that 80 per cent of the world's disabled population lives in the developing world. This is not surprising, since disability is often caused or aggravated by man-made disasters such as war and by malnutrition, poor health care, lack of education and other conditions often associated with less-developed nations. The problem is further compounded by the population explosion many of these countries face and by the fact that these countries usually lack the resources to provide supportive and rehabilitative services to their disabled citizenry.

So the situation of disabled persons in the poorer nations of the world warrants special atten-

tion. The consequences of disablement are also particularly serious for women, who may not have the same access as men to health care, vocational training and other services. Other groups facing special problems in certain parts of the globe include children, the elderly, refugees and migrant or foreign workers.

The difficulty in improving living conditions as a whole and the general scarcity of resources in developing countries make the problem of disability more formidable there. But without effective action, the results of disability will only increase a country's problems. So it is essential to include measures for dealing with disability in general development plans.

In many cases, disability can be prevented through inexpensive improvements in primary health care, immunization activities, hygiene, nutrition, occupational safety and other areas. Measures for the early detection of symptoms of impairment, followed by remedial action, are also crucial. In the long run, such measures are less costly to society than having later to care for large numbers of disabled persons. In some regions, there has been significant progress in preventive care. But in many developing countries, such programmes reach only a small proportion of those in need.

In rehabilitation, there is a growing trend towards replacing institutional treatment with services that emphasize self-care and place greater reliance on family and community resources. The goal: to help disabled persons remain with their families and function within a normal social environment. It is also important to give disabled

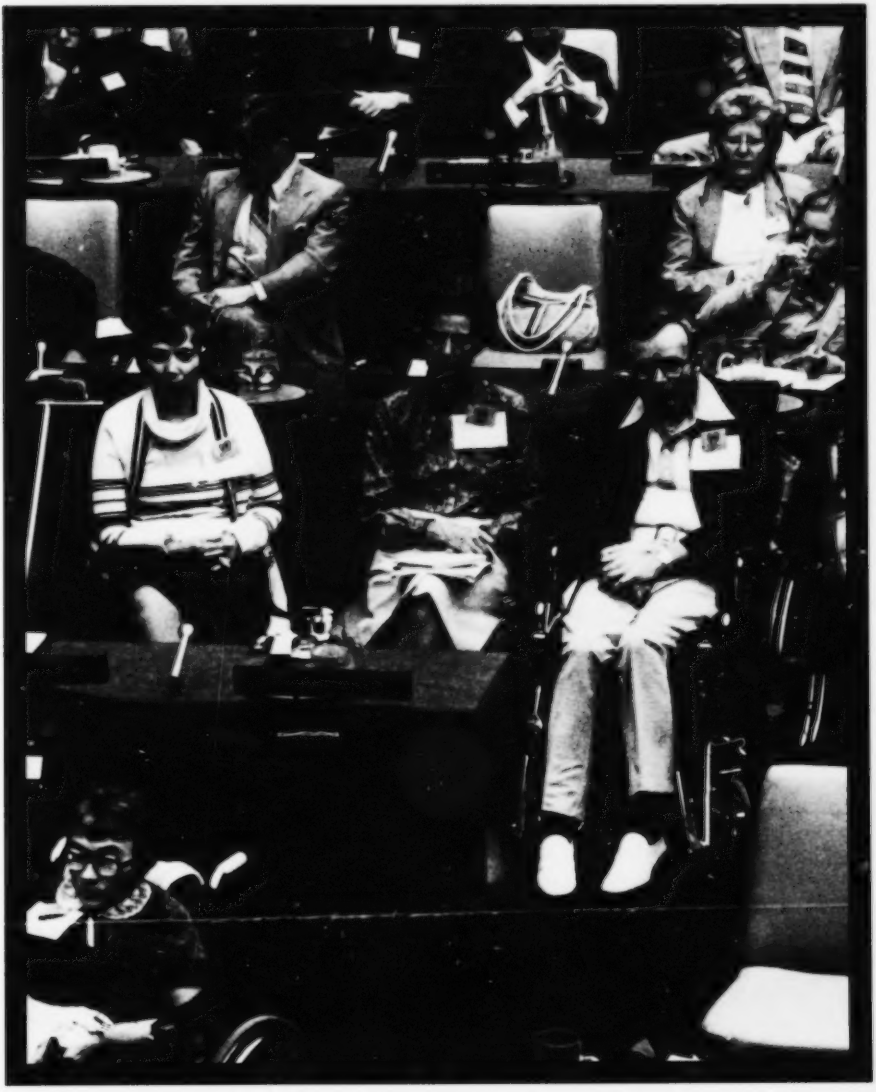
people a voice in designing and implementing their own rehabilitation. Through such grassroots efforts, which integrate community-based support services with existing social structures, even severely disabled persons can often carry out their lives with dignity and a large degree of independence.

For disabled persons to participate fully in economic and social affairs, rehabilitation measures are not sufficient. Through legislation and public education, society must ensure that they get the same opportunities as everyone else to lead a full and meaningful life. This means identifying and removing social and physical obstacles that prevent their access to normal community services. It means providing disabled children with educational services within the regular school system and assuring disabled adults of equal possibilities for employment, housing and recreation. It means bringing the benefits of development programmes to disabled citizens.

All over the world, disabled persons have begun joining together in advocacy organizations to speak up for their own rights. Through these groups, they have worked to identify their needs, evaluate their services and influence decision makers in government. These organizations also seek to promote a greater general awareness and understanding of disability among non-disabled citizens. It is crucial that public attitudes ultimately change and that society recognize the role disabled persons can play in advancing overall social and economic progress.

The World Programme of Action is a multisectoral and multidisciplinary strategy to

improve the situation of disabled persons throughout the world. In short, it serves as a policy guideline for community, national and international action and a call to the conscience of all humanity.



PROPOSALS TO IMPLEMENT THE WORLD PROGRAMME OF ACTION

NATIONAL ACTION

Because the situation of disabled persons is different in every country, and since economic capabilities and cultural traditions vary, Member States will choose their own priorities and time-frames in implementing the World Programme of Action. In all cases, though, national Governments must bear the ultimate responsibility for remedying the conditions that lead to impairment and dealing with its consequences.

It is urgent for Governments to initiate long-term programmes that are an integral part of national strategies for socio-economic development. This requires planning, organizing and financing activities at every level and establishing the legal bases to carry them out. It also requires mobilizing public and private action, co-operating in international technical assistance programmes and facilitating appropriate research.

Instead of a single agency handling the problem of disability, government ministries and private organizations should deal with the issue in their own sectors. At the same time, there should be some umbrella organization to follow these activities on a national level. This organization should involve all parties concerned, including disabled persons, and have access to the highest decision makers.

To implement the World Programme, Member States must:

- enlist the participation of disabled persons and their organizations in all activities affecting their lives;
- carry out appropriate preventive measures in

areas of health, nutrition, safety and public education;

- provide rehabilitative services and technical aids to disabled persons;
- ensure that disabled persons have opportunities for education, employment and economic, social and cultural life equal to those of other citizens;
- support community action programmes;
- provide training to those who offer services to disabled persons;
- disseminate information and promote public education to ensure a broad understanding of the issues.

Participation of Disabled Persons

Member States should increase their assistance to organizations representing those with disabilities, actively seeking out these groups and encouraging their development in every way. States should also give these organizations a chance to influence policies concerning disability through appropriate channels.

At the same time, all public and private groups should assure disabled persons the right to participate in their activities to the fullest extent possible.

Preventive Measures

The technology to prevent or control most disablement, though available, is not always fully utilized. Co-ordinated programmes of prevention at all levels of society are needed, including:

- mechanisms for early detection and intervention;
- community-based primary health care systems and immunization programmes that reach all

segments of the population, even those living in rural areas and urban slums;

- nutritional education and assistance in obtaining a proper diet, especially for mothers and children;
- effective counselling in maternal and child health care and family planning;
- measures to control the imprudent use of medication, drugs, alcohol and tobacco, particularly among schoolchildren, pregnant women and the elderly;

- safety regulations and education to prevent accidents in the home and vocational training, job-related improvements and safety programmes to prevent occupational disabilities or accidents in the workplace;
- adequate training for medical personnel and others involved in emergency care or disability-prevention programmes;
- public education and information campaigns.

Rehabilitation

Providing services: Member States are encouraged to provide disabled persons with the social, nutritional, health and vocational services that will reduce the disabling effects of their impairments and help them function to the best of their ability. These services should be distributed equally to all population groups in all geographical areas, according to need. Special measures may be needed to reach disabled persons in rural areas, urban slums and shanty towns.

Because it is better to keep disabled persons with their families and communities, the system of services must make provisions to deal with local

problems of transportation and communication, primitive or potentially hazardous living conditions and social barriers that may inhibit those in need from seeking help.

Health and social services for mentally ill persons should not be neglected.

Technical aids: It is also important to ensure that disabled persons can obtain and afford necessary technical aids and have access to repair and replacement services. To further this goal, Governments should support the domestic production of aids suited to local conditions by establishing, for example, national technological centres or similar institutes. At the same time, import taxes and other barriers that might keep out critical foreign technology should be eliminated.

Equal Opportunities

Legislative steps: Member States should take the necessary legislative steps to eliminate discriminatory practices and guarantee to disabled persons the same opportunities, rights and freedoms that other citizens enjoy. These include the right to education, work, social security and protection from inhuman or degrading treatment.

Removing physical barriers: Governments must work towards making the physical environment accessible to all disabled persons. They should make sure that new public buildings, housing and transport provide access for disabled persons and encourage necessary changes in existing facilities through renovation or other means. They should also take into account the physical needs of

persons with disabilities when planning human settlements in rural areas, for example.

In general, Governments should encourage support services that let disabled persons live as independently as possible in the community. Disabled persons themselves should have the opportunity to develop and manage these services.

Income maintenance: Member States should ensure that their disabled citizens have the same opportunities as others to all forms of income maintenance. Social security and insurance systems should not discriminate against disabled individuals and should provide services dealing with their special needs. There must also be arrangements that would allow disabled persons easily to appeal decisions involving their rights and benefits in this area.

Right to education: Disabled persons should have the same educational opportunities as everyone else. Compulsory education laws should encompass children with all ranges of disabilities and, as far as possible, provide for their education in the general school system. This may require some flexibility in matters regarding age of admission, promotion from class to class and examination procedures.

Educational services for disabled children and adults should be:

- individualized, leading to specific curriculum goals that are regularly reviewed and revised;
- within reasonable travelling distance of the pupil's residence;
- comprehensive, offering the same quality of

education to everyone irrespective of age or degree of disability.

Children who cannot be adequately educated within the general school system should be schooled in special facilities of equal quality and closely linked to the general school system.

Trained personnel should be available to help parents provide their disabled children with as normal a family environment as possible.

Disabled people should have the opportunity to participate in adult education programmes, even in rural areas. If regular programmes are not suitable, special courses or training centres may temporarily be needed. Member States should also grant disabled persons possibilities for education at the university level.

Equal employment opportunities: Measures are needed to ensure that disabled persons have equal opportunities for productive and gainful employment in the open labour market, particularly in rural areas. Governments can promote this through:

- legislative and financial incentives such as tax concessions, quotas, designated employment contracts and special assistance to enterprises employing disabled workers;
- joint programmes with employers' and workers' organizations aimed at improving recruitment policies, vocational training and the work environment;
- measures helping disabled persons obtain technical aids that they need to do their work.

Government policies and structures, however, should not hinder the vitality of the private

sector, and Member States should retain the option to respond to their domestic situations in any necessary way.

Sheltered employment should be made available for those unable to cope with the demands of competitive employment. This could take the form of production workshops, home work and self-employment schemes.

Central and local Governments can also take steps to promote the employment of disabled persons in the public sector.

Recreational and cultural life: Member States should provide disabled persons with the same opportunities as other citizens for recreational, cultural, religious and sports activities by assuring them access to facilities and making special arrangements for them as needed. These might include, for example, communication aids to help sensory-impaired persons participate in cultural activities, or special sports facilities.

Community Action

A high national priority should be giving information, training and financial assistance to local communities so that they can strengthen their own programmes for disabled persons. Governments should also make sure that the benefits from international technical assistance reach the communities in greatest need. Communities, in turn, should be encouraged to exchange information and experiences among themselves.

It is important to enlist the active participation of local government and community organizations, such as citizens' groups, trade unions, women's organizations, consumer organizations,

service clubs, religious bodies, political parties and parents' associations. Every community could designate a particular organization as a focal point for mobilizing resources for persons with disabilities.

Staff Training

Those responsible for providing services to disabled persons should not overlook the importance of staff recruitment and training.

With proper training and supervision, community workers in related fields can provide most services needed by disabled persons, who might otherwise receive no services at all. Therefore, greater emphasis should be placed on expanding the capabilities and responsibilities of health and social workers. Others who may also be trained to assist disabled persons include teachers, administrators, government planners, community leaders, clergy and family counsellors.

At the broadest level, community workers should receive comprehensive information on the social, nutritional, medical, educational and vocational needs of disabled persons. They should also be taught to encourage the full participation of disabled persons and their families in decisions concerning their own well-being.

More specific training should focus on such vital issues as early detection of impairment, the provision of primary assistance, simple rehabilitation techniques and referrals to appropriate facilities. Training should also include information on contraceptive technology and planned parenthood.

Medical teams and other personnel at refer-

ral centres, as well as doctors, also require special training. Doctors, for example, should be educated about how the indiscriminate use of some pharmaceutical products might produce disabilities. Whenever possible, training should be integrated into related services such as primary health care and community development programmes.

Special teacher training should take place in the home country, or at least in a place of similar cultural background and economic development. Such training should cover a broad spectrum, since in many developing countries the special teacher will handle many related functions.

Public Information and Education

Governments should support a comprehensive general information programme on the rights, contributions and needs of disabled persons in an effort to change public attitudes. This can be done by:

- developing guidelines that encourage the news media to portray disabilities with sensitivity, fairness and accuracy;
- incorporating into the public education system information about the realities and consequences of disablement and the importance of equalizing opportunities for disabled persons;
- providing disabled persons with training and employment opportunities in public information so that they themselves may communicate their points of view and experiences to the general public.

Public authorities are responsible for adapting their public information programmes in order

to reach disabled persons and their families. Disabled people should have the same access as anyone else to information about their civil rights and obligations and about the rights, benefits and services and devices available to disabled persons, including steps they can take to correct abuses in the system.

In disseminating public information, there may be a need for special materials for those with sensory or other limitations, or for groups whose access to normal channels of communication is limited by illiteracy, geographic remoteness or cultural factors. In some cases, for example, pictorial material or audio-visual presentations might be useful.

INTERNATIONAL ACTION

The World Programme of Action grew out of extensive consultations among Governments, the United Nations system and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. Greater progress can be achieved in reaching its goals if close co-operation is maintained at every level.

The United Nations Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs in Vienna, which has been playing a key role within the United Nations in questions of disability, should be the focal point for co-ordinating, monitoring, reviewing and appraising the World Programme.

The Trust Fund established by the General Assembly for the International Year of Disabled Persons can be used to help developing countries and organizations of disabled persons carry out the Programme. In addition, the Secretary-General should explore new ways of raising funds and increasing the flow of resources to developing countries to help them improve the condition of disabled persons. Voluntary contributions from Governments and private sources should also be encouraged.

Human Rights

The United Nations system is strongly urged to make its facilities totally barrier-free and its communications fully accessible to sensory-impaired persons. It is also urged to adopt an affirmative action plan to encourage the employment of disabled persons.

In addition, the United Nations system should ensure that all international agreements

and other instruments that it prepares or administers take into account the situation of disabled persons.

The United Nations Commission on Human Rights should note any conditions that prevent disabled persons from exercising their human rights and respond appropriately to instances of disability caused by torture or other violations of human rights.

Technical and Economic Co-operation

In the face of pressing demands for agricultural and industrial development, population control and other nation-building activities, developing countries are finding it difficult to mobilize adequate resources for their disabled citizens. It is therefore critical that their efforts be supported by the international community. The flow of resources to developing countries must be substantially increased, as stated in the International Development Strategy for the Third United Nations Development Decade.

Interregional assistance: International organizations or multilateral financial institutions collaborating with Member States in financial or technical ventures should give priority to programmes that would improve the situation of disabled persons. These organizations should also try to better co-ordinate their inputs. In addition, the United Nations system should explore with Governments ways of adapting existing or planned projects better to respond to issues involving disability.

Regional and bilateral assistance: It is important to have regional and subregional co-operation in matters relating to disability, and donor countries should be responsive to requests for assistance in this area. Regional commissions should identify needs, monitor progress, sponsor research and carry out technical co-operation programmes in their regions. They should also engage in public education and staff training activities and promote the development of organizations of disabled persons.

Information and Public Education

The United Nations should develop innovative approaches to convey information about the World Programme to audiences not regularly reached by conventional media. International organizations should also assist national and community bodies in this area.

Research

There is a pressing need for research in many areas relating to disability, including:

- the relations between non-disabled and disabled persons in different cultures to learn more about public attitudes toward disability;
- the types and incidence of disability in different countries and ways of containing its causes;
- household surveys that focus on social, economic and participation issues that affect the lives of disabled persons and the way society deals with these matters;
- cost/benefit studies of different rehabilitation policies and research into alternative approaches;
- the development of better aids and equipment for disabled persons, emphasizing solutions suited

to the technological and economic conditions of developing countries.

The United Nations system should encourage appropriate research projects, monitor international research trends to identify existing needs and priorities and promote the dissemination of research results. International governmental and non-governmental agencies should promote joint studies and the exchange of information among regional and local institutions.

Health and social science research institutions can also be of value in developing new techniques for delivering services, preparing information materials for different linguistic and cultural groups and training personnel.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Progress made in implementing the World Programme of Action should be monitored and evaluated at the international, regional and national levels. The United Nations should carry out its own periodic review, using criteria selected in consultation with Member States. It should also develop mechanisms to disseminate its findings so that they can be used to improve existing programmes.

The Statistical Division of the United Nations can help developing countries come up with a practical system for collecting data on disability. This would include the development of technical manuals on the use of household surveys. Information collected should be incorporated into future action programmes.

The Secretary-General should report periodically on progress within the United Nations system on efforts to hire more disabled persons and to make facilities and information more accessible to disabled persons.

On the basis of the periodic evaluation, as well as developments in the global social and economic situation, it may be necessary periodically to revise the World Programme of Action. These revisions should take place every five years.

For further information on the United Nations and its disability-related programmes, please contact:

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